

בס"ד
ח' כסלו תש"פ
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פרשת ויצא

When Yaakov first arrives in Charan, he immediately asks the men nearby, "אחי מאין אתם,"¹ "My brothers, where are you from?" Why does he call them "my brothers"? The Radak² says that a person calls his neighbors and fellows אחי, even if he is not necessarily close to them. He goes on to add that even if a person does not know the individual with whom they are speaking, they should still refer to them as אחי, so that way they can engage in a literally friendly conversation. This is not the first time we see in the Torah that a person begins a conversation with others by saying אחי; in *Parshas Vayeira*, when the people of Sodom come to Lot's house to confront him about the angels, his first comment is "אל נא אחי תרעו"³ - "My brethren, please do not do evil." Even when the most immoral and iniquitous people in the world are being spoken to, they still get the respect of being referred to as someone's fellow.

Rabbeinu Bechaye gives a similar answer to this question posed in this week's *parsha*. He quotes a Gemara in *Kesuvos*⁴ which says "לעולם תהא דעתו של אדם מעורבת עם הבריות" - "a person's temperament/disposition should always be pleasant toward people," and adds that Yaakov is simply acting with דרך חסידות and general piety.

Colloquially, the word "brother" is an informal term of slang that is commonly used in a snide way when talking to someone in a degrading manner. In contrast, when said in Hebrew as "אחי", the phrase is often used accompanying a good-natured demeanor. This makes sense, as a person is literally calling the other person "my brother," which immediately creates a link between the two people and instantly generates a sense of cordiality. Obviously, Yiddishkeit places a strong emphasis on the value of brotherhood, especially with the classic phrase of "אחינו כל בית ישראל,"⁵ and as we see in this week's *parsha*, all members of Klal Yisrael are intertwined through Yaakov.

In *Pirkei Avos*,⁶ Ben Zoma says, "איזהו מכובד? המכבד את הבריות" - an honored person is one who honors others. It is crucial that whenever we speak to other people, *especially* for the first time, we give them the proper respect and warmth that they deserve. There is a saying, "treat people the way you would want to be treated," but a more fitting way to put it is "treat people the way *they* would want to be treated," as that is the way that a *real* oved Hashem should act - thinking from the perspective of others, rather than from one's own perspective.

¹ בראשית כט:ד

² רד"ק בראשית כט:ד ד"ה אחי

³ בראשית יט:ז

⁴ גמ' כתובות יז.

⁵ רא"ש מסכת שביעית פרק ט משנה ח ד"ה מחלק מזון ג' סעודות לכל אחד

⁶ משניות אבות ד:א